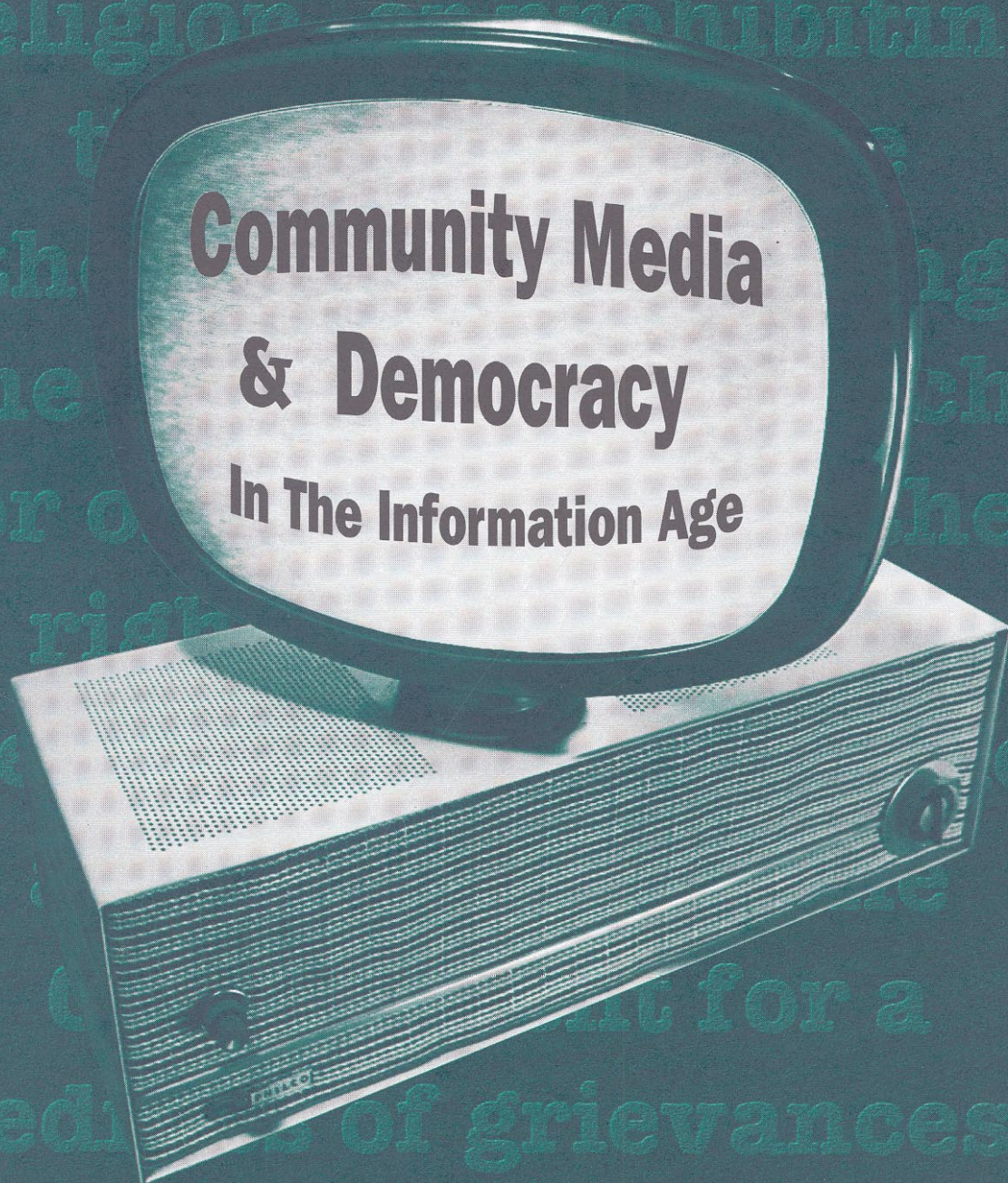


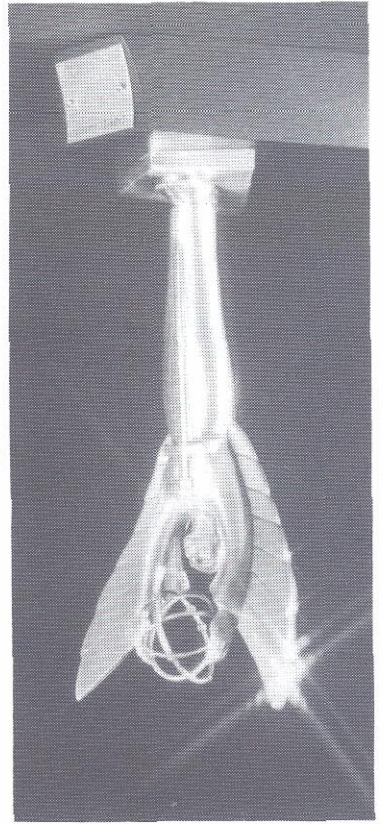
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COMMUNITY TELEVISION REVIEW

A Publication of the  
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Volume 16, Number 2 • \$4







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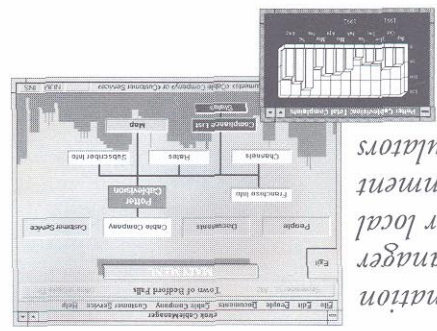
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*Cover photography and computer imaging by John Haafke.  
Cover art is a 1957 Philco Predicta from the collection of Dirk Koning.*

## Access, Advocacy and Democracy: What Will Be?

By T. Andrew Lewis

*(The following was presented at a roundtable at the recent Benton Foundation Advocacy Video Conference where, due to time constraints, it was abbreviated. It is presented here in its entirety.)*

Promotional campaigns over the past few weeks assure that we now know that we will soon be able to attend a business meeting in your bare feet, send a fax from the beach and shop for your favorite shoes from your den? And you also know, of course, which company will make it all possible. Or, since the onset of the new mating game, which partnership of companies will make it all possible.

However, wouldn't we also like to be assured that we will have the opportunity to share our view regarding the proposed school closing plan with the community? Or to argue your points on abortion or the legalization of gays in the military? Or to speak for the public interest regarding regulations that are dictating the telecommunications form of the future? What company will make that possible? What company is now spending millions to promote its intent to provide this critical forum in the electrono-democracy of the 21st century? What does the future hold for the people's access to communications as a tool of democracy and advocacy?

What will the telecommunications landscape look like? Consider yourselves among the elite if you are able to say resolutely "I don't know". Billions have been spent by those with commercial interests coupled with decision making power, and they do not know. Cable companies do not know. Telcos do not know. DBS providers do not know. The government



See Access, Advocacy & Democracy - page 20



## Court Blocks PEG Access Censorship Rules Until Judicial Review

### Alliance Public Policy Update

By Alan Bushong

On May 7, 1993, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit issued an order granting requests for stay of PEG access rules issued by the FCC on April 2. The requests had been sought by the Alliance and its coalition partners. The court further granted the Alliance's request to join this case with the appeal of leased access rules. The cases will be heard in mid-September; in the interim, there will be no PEG or leased access censorship rules. Without court action, the rules would have been implemented in mid-May.

The Alliance's motion for stay of the PEG access rules was filed by the Washington D.C. law firm of Shea & Gardner. Our thanks to this law firm, and to Michael Greenberger, David Bono and Mike Isenman.

**Get on the FAX Tree.** If you want information like this "hot off the Fax," join the Alliance's fax tree. Regional public policy chairs, the first to receive Alliance releases, in turn fax the information to regional members. In large regions, a tree structure reduces the work of any individual. If you want to receive timely releases and if you can help by sending five to ten faxes, contact your regional public policy chair, listed by region:

Region	Chair	Fax Number
Northwest	Mitch Tlustos	503-645-8561
Central States	Erik Molberg	219-422-9688
Midwest	Sheldon Maines	612-331-8578
Southwest	Paul Congo	512-478-9438
Southeast	Paul Proctor	913-829-1017
Northeast	Garret McCarey	413-445-4258
Far West	Kit Clements	916-241-0278
Mountain States	Penelope Place	505-428-1237
Middle Atlantic	Rob Wilson	703-903-6693

**Elected officials on community channels.** With growing pressure for telephone company (Telco) entry into delivery of television services, the Alliance will increasingly need to contact elected officials regarding proposed legislation. You can help the Alliance by educating federal, state and locally elected officials about PEG access and community TV.

One of the best methods is to involve elected officials on community channels. Most officials conduct town meetings during trips home; use of the local community channel extends that meeting to many more local constituents. In some

continued on page 4

### International Update

By Karen Helmersen

#### 1994 Video Olympics – Oslo, Norway

One year from now, the second international Olympiades de la Creation Video TV Locale (Video Olympics) will take place in Oslo, Norway. The first Video Olympics, in the Savoie region of France, in January of 1992, brought together more than 200 individuals representing community media from all areas of the southern and northern hemispheres. The Alliance for Community Media is again participating in this event. There will be a special planning/workshop session at the annual ACM July conference in Atlanta for anyone who may be interested.

#### Olympic Message #1

Presentation of the

2nd Bi-Annual Video Olympics for  
Community Television Productions.

Place: Scandinavia • Time: April 1994

Come to Scandinavia for the next international gathering of community television producers. We are proud to announce, in the same spirit of the first Video Olympics in Beaufortain, 1992, the creation of the Olympic Boat for 1994.

#### The Route.

The five day event will begin at the harbor in Copenhagen, Denmark where the boat will first be anchored. The next stop will be in Gothenburg, Sweden and then onwards to Oslo, Norway. At every port delegates will have an opportunity to go on shore and visit community television stations. The boat will return to Copenhagen for closing ceremonies.

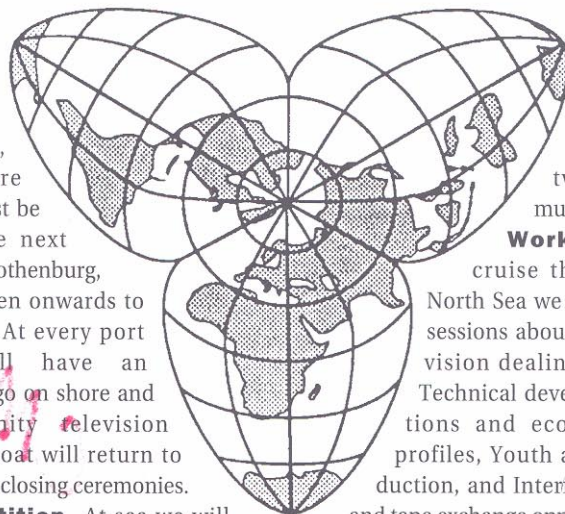
**The Competition.** At sea we will have ample opportunity to view the numerous contributions in the following five categories for the 1994 Olympics: (edited excerpts are acceptable)

**Social Impact** – production that has had a positive effect in the community, maximum 20 minutes.

**Local Tradition** – production depicting cultural and/or social life, max 10 minutes.

**Young People** – production specifically by and for youth, maximum 10 minutes, (indicate level of adult participation)

**Local Channels** – presentation of a community TV station, maximum 10 minutes.



#### Open Category

– independent production shown locally within the past two years maximum 10 minutes.

#### Workshops.

As we cruise the waters of the North Sea we will have working sessions about community television dealing with issues of: Technical development, Regulations and economy, Program profiles, Youth and creative production, and International network and tape exchange opportunities.

Registration forms will be forthcoming. Each national delegation may include up to ten participants. Registration fees covering all costs during the Olympics are not yet finalized. Our goal is a fee of around 750 danish kr (100 US \$). Further information can be obtained via our secretariat in Stockholm. Telephone rur. +46 8 208178 fax nr +46 8 108830.

Karen Helmersen is chair of the Alliance's International Committee and Deputy Director of Film/Video Arts, 817 Broadway, New York, NY 10003. Telephone (212) 673-9361.



## Over 2,000 Entries In Hometown Video Festival

Local cable programming continues to thrive in the United States and Canada, evidenced by the more than 2,000 entries received in the 1993 Hometown Video Festival, sponsored by the Alliance for Community Media (formerly the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers).

A total of 2,020 entries from 420 cities in 40 states and five Canadian provinces were received this year, marking the third straight year entries have exceeded 2,000.

The high numbers indicate a continued growth in the quantity and quality of video programming produced by community groups, individuals, educators, government agencies, and cable companies for presentation on local cable channels.

Now in its 16th year, the Hometown Video Festival is the oldest and largest video competition honoring the work of local cable programmers. The Festival includes 37 categories, including four "Overall Excellence" categories which honor outstanding public, educational, and government access facilities and local origination centers of North American cable systems.

Hometown judging involves 35 different access facilities and cable companies as preliminary judging sites. Each site selects four finalists from their assigned categories which are forwarded to the final judging location, which was held this year at Portland Cable Access Television in Portland, OR May 21-23.

Hometown winners will be announced and awards presented July 22, 1993 in Atlanta, Georgia at an Awards Night Ceremony during the annual convention of the Alliance for Community Media.

For further information, contact Randy VanDalsen, Hometown Video Festival, c/o



The Buske Group, 2015 "J" Street, Suite 28, Sacramento, CA 95814. Telephone (916) 441-6277. Look for the finalists in the next issue of CTR.

### CTR Available in Bulk

CTR is now available for purchase in bulk quantities. The magazine is an ideal primer for access center staff and board members, volunteers, cable officers, producers, funding sources, or anyone who needs to know more about community media.

Minimum orders of 25 or more are available at a cost of \$2 each for Alliance members and member organizations, plus shipping and handling. Due to limited overprints, availability is not guaranteed unless reserved prior to printing.

Upcoming issues include one on the how and why of Access and a recap of the upcoming national convention in Atlanta. For information on availability, contact CTR at 616/454-6663, or write CTR, 15 Ionia SW, Suite 201, Grand Rapids, MI 49503-4113.

A number of back issues of CTR also remain available from the national office at a cost of \$4 members, \$2 non-members. For availability and ordering, contact the Alliance at 202/393-2650, or write 666 11th St. NW, Suite 806, Washington, DC 20001-4542.

### CTR Goes to Convention

The CTR Editorial Board will be meeting twice during the national convention in Atlanta. A general

business meeting will be held Wednesday, July 21 at 3:00 p.m., followed on Friday, July 23 with a 1:00 p.m. meeting to determine themes for future issues.

Members are welcome to attend and encouraged to submit their comments. Look for editorial board members at the convention, identified by a special ribbon on their name tag.

### Calls for Entries

June 30 is the deadline for submitting programs to the 1993 *Philo T. Farnsworth Video Competition*, sponsored by the Central States Region of the Alliance. Any noncommercial program cablecast between July 1, 1992 and June 29, 1993 is eligible.

For forms and information, contact Comcast Cablevision at 313/674-3622.

Entry deadline is July 15 for the 1993 *Gabriel Awards*, sponsored by Unda USA, the National Catholic Association of Broadcasters and Communicators.

For details and entry forms, call 513/429-2663.

### Dear CTR,

I was pleased to see mention of the collaborative project produced at SCAT in the recent issue of CTR, however I must point out the incorrect credit. Deep Dish TV had nothing to do with the project. The collaboration was between Paper Tiger TV and SCAT. The Tufts University Art Gallery also played a major part, providing the space for the installation as well as funding (source: Somerville Arts Council).

I do not consider this to be major fault (merely an unchecked fact) and would hardly mention it

were it not for the context in which it was, that of "collaborations". Having been part of many such collaborations (almost everything we do), Paper Tiger has often been in the middle of such incorrect identification. It can sometimes be very disheartening to be "forgotten" and to have one's contribution "erased". I realize that I am making a mountain out of a mole hill, however I feel it is important to make the point that we all need to be sensitive to the issue of identification and inclusion.

Working in a field as vital as alternative media, against the alienating power of the media monolith, collaborations are crucial and I praise CTR for illuminating their potential. This is my concern and I thank you for your attention.

For the Collective,  
Linda Iannacone

*Editor's Note: We plead mea culpa, (really it was a bad fax from a third party). Here's a nifty idea to all such non-profits, however. Add CTR to your mailing list. We can't always promise we'll run something because of space limitations, but if we do, at least we'll get it right. The address is 15 Ionia SW, Suite 201, Grand Rapids, MI 49503-4113.*

### Accessing the Alliance

**Jobline.** For access jobs across America, or to post job openings, call (202) 393-2653.

**Bulletin Board.** To connect, call (217) 359-9118, and set your computer's modem to 300, 1200 or 2400 baud, 8 bits, 1 stop bit, no parity.

**National Office.** Call (202) 393-2650, fax (202) 393-2653, or write 666 11th St. NW, Suite 806, Washington, DC 20038-4542.

### To Express Your Views on Telecommunications Issues to Congress

The Congressional Committees that deal with telecommunications issues are:

#### The House of Representatives: Energy and Commerce Committee

John Dingell, Chair - Room 2125 Rayburn House Office Bldg., Washington, DC 20515-6115 202/225-2927.

#### The Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance

Edward J. Markey, Chairman - 316 Ford House Office Bldg., Washington DC 20515, 202/226-2424.

#### The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee

Ernest J. Hollings, Chair - Room SDOB-508 Washington DC 20515 202/224-5115.

#### The Communications Subcommittee

Daniel Inouye, Chair - SHOB-227, Washington DC 20515 202/224-9340.



# Highlights of Alliance Convention in Atlanta on July 21-25

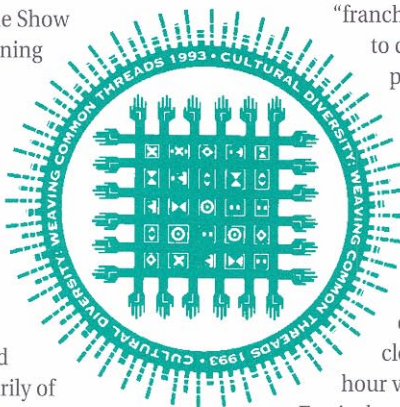
The 1993 Alliance National Convention and Trade Show in Atlanta, July 21-25, draws nearer. Members planning to attend may be interested in the following highlights on convention plans and progress.

1. The Georgia Tech Theater for the Arts is the site for this year's Hometown Video Festival. This state-of-the-art theater was the setting for last year's Vice Presidential debate.

2. The dimensions of the Giant Tapestry Display will be 5 foot wide and 6 foot tall. In addition, the circumference of the inner circle will be 4 1/2 ft. in diameter. A series of burlap cloth bindings will hold the all natural structure together, composed primarily of mahogany with a Georgia-pine base. There will be no metal parts. A plexi-glass cover with hieroglyphics similar to the figures used on the logo will adorn the outer frame. Additional pieces of fabric\* provided by convention participants, will add and complete the overall design. The creator/master builder Charles "Jikki" Riley, is a songwriter-vocalist and visual artist by trade. He says, "this creation is an abstract, patchwork quilt, symbolizing our connective humanity."

\* [The fabric you bring should be no larger than 5" X 5", and no smaller than 3" X 3"].

3. People TV, Atlanta's public access center, is in the middle of



"franchise renewal." There is a possibility we may be able to coordinate an examination of Atlanta's renewal process during the conference's Pre-convention workshops. The cast of characters would be: Jean Rice, the city's franchise consultant, Rita Bloom, the city of Atlanta's communication liaison, Adrian E. Herbst of Moss & Barnett, W. Chris Leonard, General Manager - People TV and a representative from Georgia Cable Television.

4. Our cable company - GCTV, has connected the public access channel to the hotel's closed circuit system. We will be set-up to provide 24 hour viewing of convention highlights, Hometown

Festival entries, sample work from access centers nationwide and interactive software. The programs themselves will originate from master control at People TV (Atlanta's public access station), making it possible for "wired" Atlanta residents to watch our "marathon cablecast"\*\*\* during convention week - look out CNN.

\*\*\* [You may bring as many access programs as you like. Airing will be subject to our discretion and other scheduling concerns. 3/4" & 1/2" formats are acceptable.]

- W. Chris Leonard

## Public Policy Update

continued from page 2

communities, live call-in programs directly connect the viewing audience. Another source of contact is programming produced in Washington, D. C., as an increasing number of United States Representatives and Senators produce monthly television programs through congressional production facilities. (See story - page 13)

**Everyone wins.** Elected officials have an inexpensive way to reach TV viewers with a high likelihood to vote (surveys show community TV viewers are well above average in political activity and voting); cable viewers get in-depth information, rather than occasional sound bites; the Alliance contacts legislators who are both educated about and invested in PEG access.

Community contact with elected officials is important, regardless of channel designation. In communities with separate public and government access channel managers, cooperation is important. Prior to the 1984 Cable Act, all community TV was called public access. That concept of a community as a whole represents the community service basis on which community TV was founded.

**Alliance Members Rising to the Challenge.** Through early May, Alliance

members have raised over \$12,000 for public policy initiatives. Contributors of \$400 and over were listed in the last issue. Other contributors, primarily individual and affiliate members, listed with state of residence include: T. Schneider, OH; D. Rottinghaus, OH; Ohio Chapter; W. Baer, OH; J. Powell, OH; S. Dicile, OR; R. Cole, OH; G. Burns, WA; W. Gwyn, OH; NE Illinois Chapter; C. Kucharski, OH; Shrewsbury Public Access, MA; C.A. Solomos, Inc., OH; Central States Region; J. Katz, MA; Defiance Community TV, OH; A. Quinn, NY; Tipp-Monroe Cable Acc Comm, OH; C. Berquist, OH; C. Sherwood, MA; M. Witsch, NY; G. Vawter, OH; M. Kessel, MA; Foxboro Cable Access, MA; D. Koshover, OH; M. Ereslan, MA; Michigan Chapter; A. Dodge, OH; J. Omelchuck, OR; Friends of Public Access, OH; M. Kellner-Angel, OH; S. Hanley, CT; Chittendon Community TV, VT; J. Orndorff, OH; J. Miller, OH; Scrip-Safe Security Products, OH.

Your good work assists the Alliance in building community into all media.

*Alan Bushong is chair of the Alliance's Public Policy Committee and Executive Director of Capital Community Television, 585 Liberty St., Salem, OR 97308-2342. Telephone (503) 588-2288.*



## Related Resources

### FCC Rules on PEG Access Available from the Alliance

The complete copy of the Federal Communications Commission's April 2 rules regarding public, educational and governmental access is available from the Alliance at a cost of \$5 for members, \$10 non-members.

For more information, contact the Alliance at 666 11th NW, Suite 806, Washington, DC 20001-4542. Telephone 202/393-2650. Fax 202/393-2653.

### FCC's Report & Orders Available from NATOA

The FCC's Report & Order in MM Docket No. 92-263 relating to Consumer Protection and Customer Service and the Report & Order in MM Docket 92-266 relating to Rate Regulation are available from the National Association of Telecommunications Officers and Advisors, reprinted in full form.

Cost of the 530-page report on Rate Regulation is \$55 to non-members and \$40 to NATOA members, while the 53-page report on Consumer Protection and Customer Service is available for \$13 to non-members and \$10 to members, plus shipping and handling.

NATOA is an affiliate of the National League of Cities. For more information, contact NATOA Publications, 1301 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20004. Telephone 202/626-3160. Fax 202/626-3103.



**A**nother Tsunami size wave of change is flooding the world's cultures – another in a series of long-waves of economic and technological restructuring that periodically come crashing out of the centers of empire. When such waves break the world shifts, new territory and new options appear wet and convulsive before our eyes. There are glimmering, new found freedoms sloshing around in pools of oppression. The governed, oppressed and colonized are inching from decades of domination, shedding crusty cocoons with an insatiable appetite to spread wings and fly.

Democracy/People Rule has new family members looking to older cousins for models of behavior. Communities can only earn the title if they communicate. Keepers of the flame and bearers of the sword are giving way to keepers of the camcorders, computers and fax. The new tools of communication are fundamentally important to the evolution of fledgling democracies.

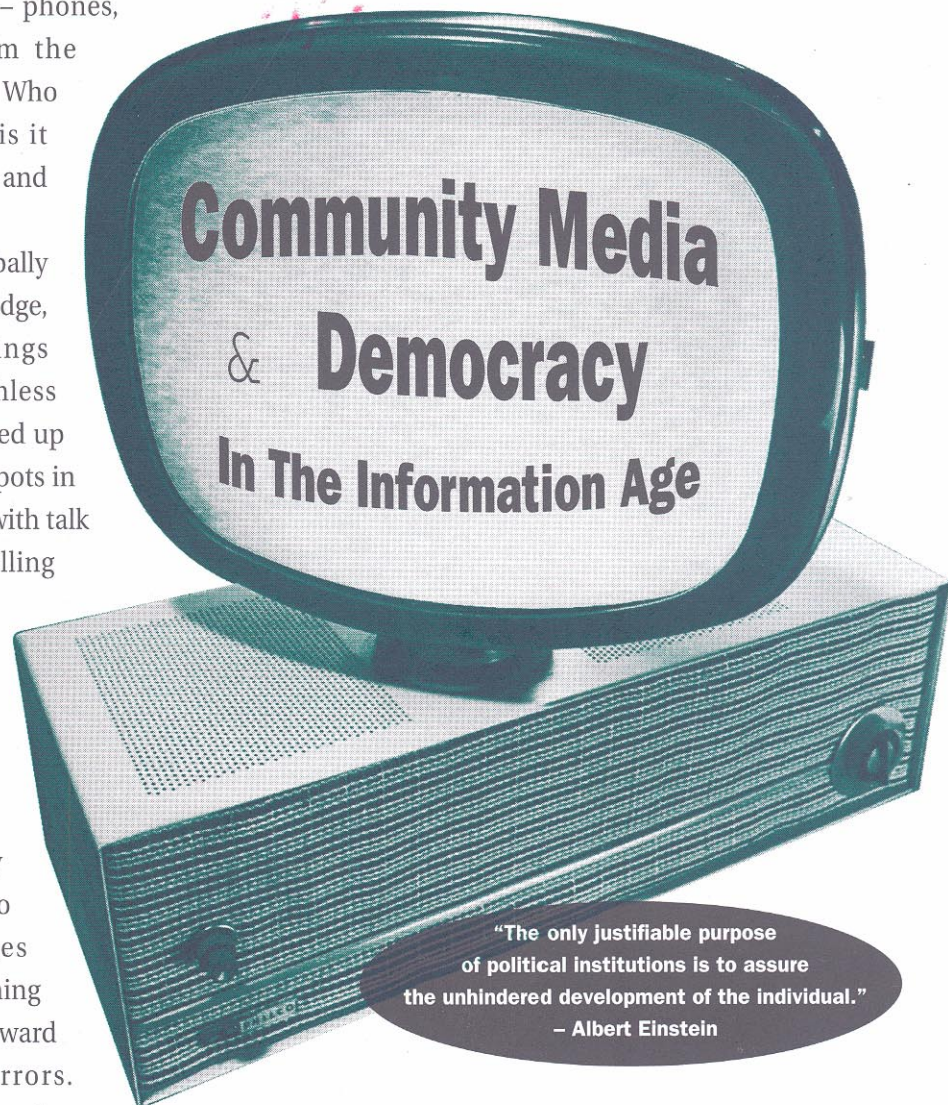
Like foundation stones to a builder – phones, presses, a/v and computers form the building blocks of new world orders. Who has access to what media, where is it located, when and why can they use it and for what price and purpose.

American media is offered up globally as a model. But like a fat chunk of fudge, its initial satiation of sweet cravings ultimately leaves you hungry, toothless and with arteries clogged like a stopped up toilet. Yes we have dial tone in most spots in the U.S., yes we have 50 TV channels with talk of 500, yes we have radio stations filling the spectrum, yes HDTV will allow you to see a few extra buffaloes in “Dances with Wolves”. . .but what’s the point, what’s the motive?

Authors of this issue wrestle with such questions. Fred Johnson questions media massagers and why seeds of grass are sprouting up as astro turf. Dee Dee Hallek challenges “Whittlevision’s” motives in teleteaching U.S. kids. Pamela Portwood forces forward thinkers to check rear view mirrors. Langdon Winner mandates no technology without representation. Andrew Gillespie and Kevin Robins search the geography of the new media, while Dirk Koning drops you in the middle of media mercenaries gathered in Amsterdam.

History may record this quarter century as a watershed in human evolution as messages and mediums are amplified a thousand fold. But the verdict is far from in regarding the liberating value of such a surge or its systematic subjugation of world citizens.

– Fred Johnson and Dirk Koning, Co-Editors-in-Chief



**“The only justifiable purpose of political institutions is to assure the unhindered development of the individual.”**

**– Albert Einstein**



## Democracy in the Information Age

By Fred Johnson

In case everyone has not noticed, the "golden age of grass roots has arrived," according to Jack Bonner of Bonner Associates, a lobbying firm that specializes in seizing unfocused public sentiment and anger, and raining it down on politicians and policy makers. To do this Bonner Associates uses fax, data networks and a newly computerized, million-dollar phone system capable of handling 300 callers at once. They call members of the public, rouse them with political discussion and then "patch them through" to their representatives in Washington or the state house. The enraged citizen does not even have to hang-up and redial.

Bonner Associates is also adept at utilizing radio and the new cable channels to get their client's message out rather than buying expensive ad time. Sounds like the "Golden Age of Grass Roots" does it not? Not when you understand that Bonner Associates' clients are all corporations (banks, railroads and auto makers) rather than the civil rights groups and environmental organizations who have historically relied on grass roots efforts to counter the power and connections of the big corporations. Definitely Astro Turf.

Bonner Associates' preemptive use of technology on behalf of the powerful instead of the powerless is part of a

historical pattern central to any discussion of democracy in the "information age." It looks something like this: A new technology is made available. Sweeping claims are made about the technical potential of the new technology to change any number of things, particularly social relationships; things like who gets to speak publicly, what gets to be said and imagined or who will have energy and power. Groups who are looking to change society then seize on the highly publicized potential of the new technology as a means of bringing about the change they are working toward. There is much excitement; "why if you look at the potential of this stuff we could create a democratic society - utopia!"

Then people become advocates of the technology as much as for the changes they wish to bring about; something in the technology becomes "inherently democratic" or it is a "decentralizing technology" with democratic implications. And before you know it we have ordered the fried ice cream once again, the grass roots turns out to be Astro Turf.

This pattern is particularly present when it comes to communications technology. In the early stages of film, Democrats, Labor and Socialists all touted film

*The "Information Age" is a kind of marketing gimmick masking the true relations of power and technology. It is another in a long line of images that mislead by focusing on the technical potential of a new technology rather than the social and cultural limitations that ultimately determine how a technology is implemented, and who will benefit from it.*

to be an inherently popular and therefore democratic art and technology, only to see film developed by the new style entrepreneurs into the centerpiece of the mass consumption society, and a major tool for social control and propaganda.

Similarly much modern art was originally seen as a universal and thus democratic expression of the alienation and strangeness of modern times; but after a few decades of development most of the

techniques of the avant garde artists emerge as the technical strategies of advertising and commercial media.

Marshall McLuhan, whose ideas were seminal for community media and cable access, effusively spread the notion in the '60s that electricity and electronic media "are profoundly decentralizing and separatist in their psychic and social consequences." Of course the various forms of centralization, of power, ownership, control and geography have accelerated since McLuhan's pronouncements. Principally by means of media and electronic communications. It is a fact that escapes today's advocates of an "electronic citizenship" to come about through the use of fax, modem, interactive data bases and the new media channels, and yes, the "convergence" of computer managed data and image communications.

It's the same old fried ice cream and it still has not arrived at our table. On the other hand something has certainly arrived at Bonner Associates' table, like a couple of CEOs and the chair of the board. Jack Bonner will tell them about the time he got local groups of physically challenged people to oppose auto emission standards, arguing that smaller cars would be harder for the physically challenged to enter.

**The Information Age.** The "Information Age" is a kind of marketing gimmick masking the true relations of power and technology. It is another in a long line of images that mislead by focusing on the

**Pattern recognition:**  
*or how many times do you order the fried ice cream before you realize it somehow never makes it to your table.*

### Electronic Frontier Foundation

"Until now the nation's telecommunications policy debate has largely been perceived as a struggle among entrenched commercial interests over who will control and dominate markets such as information services, manufacturing, and long distance service. We believe it is time to refocus the debate by seeking near-term technological, economic, legislative and regulatory solutions which will encourage the rapid development of a diverse information services market and help realize the democratic potential of new information media."

Opening statement from the Electronic Frontier Foundation's Open Platform Document.

### Civic Networking

"Information infrastructure funded by government should target important non-market applications beyond simply big science's grand challenges. An infrastructure is not only a set of facilities, but the people and skills needed to use them. Facilities, people and skills must be commonly available to further activities of both public and private parties. Ultimately, when people have access to, and the skills to use the infrastructure, they more fully share in its benefits."

Richard Cville, The Center for Civic Networking addressing NET '93 in Washington, DC



technical potential of a new technology rather than the social and cultural limitations that ultimately determine how a technology is implemented, and who will benefit from it.

The "Information Age" (not to be confused with the very real implications of the information economy) promises a technological utopia in which the disparities of race, class, gender and regional differences are overcome through the use of info tech. All the sleek, futuristic ads for cable, CD ROM, personal computers pictured with souped up looking car engine parts implicitly promise to distribute power – "All information in all places at all times" – in short a solution to the problems of democratic development everywhere.

Of course the truth of the howling, techno-industriality of the times hardly matches the image of the "information age." Historically, the introduction of new technology has increased centralization and concentrations of power, ownership and control – expanding the means of controlling regions and cultures from afar. The dominant forces in society always implement new technology and they are always best positioned to use it to maintain their advantage. Rather than being inherently democratic, technology, as it is now used, is probably better thought of as inherently authoritarian and anti-democratic.

Wiring the cities of the United States with cable was part of a developing global information economy, a response, by business and government, to the post-war spectre of dwindling energy resources, overburdened ecosystems and a world market glutted with traditional products (cars and home gadgets). Democracy has little to do with the massive long-term investment in global communications and transportation, which, coupled with huge subsidies from U.S. war and space research, have set the stage for the developing global economy.

This is a stage on which info tech has facilitated the creation of massive unemployment and ruthless exploitation of less developed countries and regions – the destruction of public wealth in favor of privatization, the distortion of every culture on the planet with a rush of images and data collapsed into reckless commercial media.

Selling images, data and information appliances is a godsend to a world economy whose markets are glutted. Compare the time it takes to consume a television program to the time it takes to consume an automobile and you can see that in the markets of information, spectacle, arts and culture, consumption time decreases to the "twinkling of an eye". The circulation of money is sped up and the time one waits for a return on investments decreases.

That is the information economy. And that is why there is cable television. Our home television is now redesigned as the consumption site for images and data marketed from anywhere on the planet; it also displays the output of most of the new information appliances now occupying shop windows. Perhaps

most importantly, it lodges in the private space of the home the perfect means to manage and control public opinion and taste, so necessary to the success of the information economy.

**Democracy.** Information technology and economies are not the solution to democratic development, they are the problems democratic development must address. Information technology, because it is the core infrastructure of the information economy, is an extremely important site of struggle for democracy. But that struggle has to go forward in the information economy, not the "information age."

From such a perspective the issues look somewhat different. The First Amendment starts to look like technology, a technical crutch behind which we can sit back and let the petty entrepreneurs and self promoters take advantage of cable access while access management fails to find ways to engage people who are working for democracy. The First Amendment is a symptom of democracy not its guarantee; and a pretty flimsy foundation to build upon when compared to the magnitude and power of the forces in the information economy.

The real issues are not about free expression but finding democratic communication forms that allow people and communities to participate in their own development. The real issues are not about "access" but about finding forms of public ownership and common ownership, and control, within which we can create a new culture of justice. Access activists probably have more to learn from the environmentalists exploring the ways landforms and ecosystems can be protected through common ownership than from the ACLU.

We are living in the illusion of the "information age" when we fail to understand that our access channels, satellite transponders, and the lines we use to build interactive citizen's data bases, are private property in a global information economy. They are not common or public property; and soon their monetary or political prices will be bid up by the market, and out of reach.

To uncritically accept the idea of an "information age" creates an illusion about democracy and social justice. It predisposes us to accept the lie that democracy is in technology; it puts us in danger of failing to recognize that only human agency can bring about a just society. It makes us advocates of technology (which is always controlled by dominant groups) rather than democratic cultural forms. It makes us order the fried ice cream once again. "But since this is a new era, perhaps you would prefer the fried frozen yogurt, no calories or fat and it still won't ever arrive at your table."

*Fred Johnson is a member of Media Working Group. He is a media artist and documentary maker who writes about communications and development issues. He may be reached at 816 Greer Ave., Covington, KY 41011. Telephone 606/581-0033. Fax 606/581-0009.*

## **MediaCulture Review takes aim at mainstream media**

**Published six times a year, MediaCulture Review draws on original articles published within the alternative press to cover such media issues as monopoly ownership, emerging technologies, conservative censorship of media and culture, alternative film and video, biases in reporting, and media of the future.**

**Nominated by the Utne Reader as one of the best new alternative publications when it debuted in 1991, MCR is published by the Institute for Alternative Journalism, a non-profit organization created by the editors and publishers within the Association of Alternative Newspapers to help strengthen independent media. The organization also maintains AlterNet, an electronic news wire and clearinghouse for independent media available on PeaceNet.**

**Subscriptions to MCR are \$24 per year for individuals (\$36 for institutions). For more information, contact MCR at 100 East 85 St., New York City, NY 10028. Telephone 212/799-4822.**



# Renewing the Dream of Access

*We need to create a new paradigm and new processes, so that access can transcend the passivity that television engenders and the apathy about issues that American society promulgates.*

By Pamela Portwood

Now that public access has been in existence for more than 20 years, participants are starting to ask what access was intended to be and what access has become. Alliance Chair Andrew Blau presented his answer last fall at the Alliance's Far West Conference: "For me, the dream for access has always been about empowerment, about giving people tools to get their hands on essentially the means of production of video programming, but really the means of production of social power. The dream was about community communication, about diverse and alternative points of view being seen in the media for the first time."

In the 1970s, when the media was the purview of three networks, having political action groups and individuals who were neither wealthy nor famous present their concerns on television must have seemed revolutionary, a way to change the world. Certainly, the alternative views envisioned by the first generation of access have found their way onto the medium.

Yet, in the 1990s, individuals presenting their own idiosyncratic view of the universe is commonplace on access. "A bastion of 'wannabe', crackpot and vanity programming" is access' public image, as Robert H. Devine said at the Alliance's National Conference. According to Devine, chair of the communications department at Antioch College, the central problem is that in considering access' First Amendment obligations, we have focused on the "autonomy of private expression" and paid little heed to the other First Amendment thread that is "forming public opinion through public discourse."

Access also seems to have become preoccupied with product rather than process. Most access center funds go to purchase equipment, to train members in video-production techniques and to show their programs on public-access channels. Whether the producer actually has a message to communicate often seems beside the point. And, as Devine points out, the value of access programming is often assessed by commercial television's standards of technical excellence

rather than by community engagement.

As Blau writes in *The Independent*, "We should thus be deeply skeptical about any claims that access is inherently democratizing. Such claims are made through the narcotic haze of technological utopianism that was widespread at the time when access first appeared in cable franchises. Experience demonstrates that it is how access channels are used that spells the difference between their being a contribution to democracy or alternative entertainment." If access to video is not inherently democratizing, then how can access centers move to help fulfill the dream of free speech acting as a catalyst to democracy?

Is it ever enough simply to provide the tools for individuals to speak out? Certainly, providing a forum for disempowered members of our society is important. For how can a democracy represent the

*Access centers must consciously reach out to those community members whose ethnicity, economic status, gender, age or disability has told them repeatedly that they have nothing to say.*

people if we as people do not know ourselves in our full diversity?

Access centers must consciously reach out to those community members whose ethnicity, economic status, gender, age or disability has told them repeatedly that they have nothing to say. We must help them find their message, and then we can teach them which buttons to press.

When we speak of "the means of production" and other political contexts, access centers must remember that art and culture have an important role in public discourse. (Jesse Helms and the National Endowment for the Arts controversy should tell us this.) We need to nurture the practice of culture through public access, to encourage artists and others to use access to express their visions, dreams and critiques of our society.

Overall, access centers need to encourage producers to think in terms of creating public discourse rather than simply producing video. This is an essential matter of changing the context of access for both access users and staff. We need to foster video literacy and educate our members about TV: how form effects content, how mimicking the look of a network show influences the way their audience perceives their message.

## Quotes from the FCC

### Before Community Television

"...sit down in front of your television set when your station goes on the air and stay there without a book, magazine, newspaper, profit and loss sheet, or rating book to distract you - keep your eyes glued to the set until the station signs off. I can assure you that you will observe a vast wasteland."

Newton N. Minow as newly elected FCC chair in 1961 talking to the nation's broadcasters.

### Another view 30+ years later

"Local access in most places is a kind of farce. An open mike doesn't guarantee quality...I think we can do better and we must do better...but local access by most estimates has not lived up to its public interest potential."

FCC Commissioner Ervin Duggan addressing the National Academy of Cable Programmers in DC.

If you take exception to Duggan's assessment of access, you can voice your concern by contacting him c/o FCC, 1919 M Street NW, Washington, DC 20554, or by phone 202/632-6996.



And we must end the assumption that producing a show and cablecasting it is sufficient to ensure an audience, especially the right viewers for programs that narrowcast. Access needs to encourage members to promote their programs and activities vigorously and to pursue community engagement with their message. Discussing these methods should become standard fare in all staff and member interactions.

The national access community has begun moving toward these goals by rewarding community impact with Hometown Video Festival awards. So too, access centers, such as Tucson Community Cable Corporation and Quote...Unquote, Inc. in Albuquerque, NM, have implemented policies to ensure their limited resources are available to a larger sector of the community.

At the heart of the question "Is access fulfilling the dream?" is an anomaly: how can access centers help cultivate public discourse without influencing program content? If we reach out to underserved populations, we are influencing our constituencies although they will still speak their own minds. The

answer seems to be that we need to encourage the creation of content-oriented programming (whatever its nature) and to promote discourse through varied means.

We in the access community need to admit that despite the successes of individual producers and programs, access has not fulfilled the dream of distributing alternative information and fostering the debate essential to a democracy. Still, we should not lose hope and simply give up.

As so many people keep saying, we need to stop thinking of access as television. We need to create a new paradigm and new processes, so that access can transcend the passivity that television engenders and the apathy about issues that American society promulgates. After two decades, we must recommit ourselves to ensuring that access does make a difference in American culture.

*Pamela Portwood is a consultant who edits and publishes the Envision newspaper for Tucson Community Cable Corporation. A longer version of this article appeared in the spring 1993 Envision. TCCC is located at 124 E. Broadway, Tucson, AZ 85701. Phone: (602) 624-9833.*

## Survey Results Published

### Public Access Cable Programming, Controversial Speech, and Free Expression

**P**ublic access cable, seen through the atypical angle of its most controversial programming, demonstrates its unique role in electronic media, as a local community television service open to all," concludes a recent survey by Patricia Auferheide, assistant professor in the School of Communication at The American University and contributing writer for *Lies Of Our Times* magazine.

The study, involving 81 cable access centers nationwide and funded by the Freedom Forum, "demonstrates that controversial programming—vulnerable to suppression under some proposed means of implementing the 1992 Cable Act—often not only serves as a valuable service for immediate communities of reference, but expands the public sphere by expanding public discussion, debate and awareness of community issues and cultural realities," according to Auferheide.

The 81 access centers represented a cross section of community television providers—regionally diverse; large and small centers; those operated by non-profits, government and cable companies—and included both mail surveys and telephone interviews. "Roughly speaking, this diversity was typical of the population of the Alliance, and probably of access nationwide," says Auferheide.

The survey also probed access center directors' thoughts on the ramifications of the PEG Access Rules of the 1992 Cable Act, as well as past experiences with controversial programming.

"The programming produced by various community interests with minimal access to mainstream media showcases concerns of a subculture to itself in the language of that subculture, whether through public affairs or dramatic work or comedy. This is apparent in programs by, for instance, African Americans, gays and lesbians, and young people."

"But as well, cable access performs a larger civic function. It acts as an electronic public space where citizens can not only hear about issues of public concern but participate in the creation of that debate, whether through making programming or through the debates both on and off the cable service precipitated by the expanding of the arena of speech."

Copies of the survey are available from Auferheide for \$5 each. Contact her c/o The American University, School of Communication, 4400 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20016-8017. Telephone 202/885-2060.



"Smashing the Myths of the Information Industry!"

### ROAR! The Paper Tiger Television Guide to Media Activism

An indispensable tool for media activists, artists and producers, this handy guide presents a number of think pieces, along with informative articles covering everything from production how-to's, tips, and funding to lists of resources that include funding sources, media organizations, producers and publications.

Paper Tiger Television is a volunteer collective that produces public access series on media, culture and politics. The guide was produced in association with the Wexner Center for the Arts at Ohio State University.

Copies of ROAR! are available at \$10 each through Paper Tiger Television, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012. Telephone 212/420-9045. Fax 212/420-8223.



# Tactical Television in Paradiso

## *Re-imagining the Basic Nature and Foundation of Television*

By Dirk Koning

AMSTERDAM, Netherlands – Smoke billowed into the ancient church from foyer doors. Techno-pop tunes pulsated with such intensity the smoke seemed to swirl synchronously. In rolled a 6-foot high elongated-rectangle-of-a-thing covered with fresh sow skins. Pert pink nipples by the half dozen dotted the rolling box and encircled a cut-out spot in front that had a video lens protruding. Accompanying this intensely grotesque and foul smelling machine was a striking blonde Dutch woman in lacy 1920's modern-millie-meets-vampula attire. The machine spoke to people it accosted and the images from its camera were being projected live on a large-screen monitor just barely visible through the smog. So began another phase of the January conference in Amsterdam on *The Next 5 Minutes of Tactical Television*.

Several hundred participants worldwide flocked to Amsterdam's counter-cultural icon, the Paradiso, site of this media art/activist enclave. This converted church hosts top-line concerts, films, seminars and in our case an orgy of sight and sound. The conference and exhibition was organized around five themes: the camcorder revolution, tactical television and visual art, tactical television in the Southern Hemisphere, tactical television as a means to democracy in East Europe and the role of tactical television in wartime.



Additionally a tape library housed several hundred titles brought by participants and curated for the event. Eight viewing centers around the Paradiso's first balcony were packed with groups sharing images and ideas. The required deposit

to check out a tape for viewing was standard ID or a shoe.

The second balcony was aglow from a half dozen computer screens illuminating the faces of Europe's premier computer networkers and hackers. Free speech in cyberspace is far more active than anywhere else.

Conference organizers struggled with a title and settled on Tactical Television instead of "alternative" or "underground". The "Next 5 Minutes" portion refers to the rapidity of change in this arena. As conference materials stated, "All those invited have a desire to re-imagine the basic nature and foundation of television. TV tacticians can be individual media activists trying to communicate their messages through public access channels, small production companies testing the limits of established TV from the inside, TV-art projects using the latest techniques to develop a new kind of language, independent stations fiercely resisting political influences or some remarkable people within big TV institutions developing radically new programme concepts."

Located in the back of one of the Paradiso's two on-site coffee shop/pubs was a full remote studio transmitting live interviews throughout Amsterdam on the local access channel. There

were more camcorders per capita than any event I've ever attended or seen. (In fact I was packing a new marvel for this old "videographer" in the form of a new Hi-8mm camcorder. A three person co-op went-in to buy it and it constantly tore me from the realm of imagination driven theory to battery powered reality.) These 5-pound light catching wonders are empowering global citizens in ways we can only begin to imagine. For example, Pest Lazlo from Hungary's Black Box television group talked of one of his programs that forced the resignation of Hungary's Minister of the Interior, and how other video producers in Eastern Europe are arming themselves with "light catchers" to lead the way toward democratic reform. Goren Milic joined me on a panel to talk of truly independent television from Yugoslavia and the daily life threatening risks



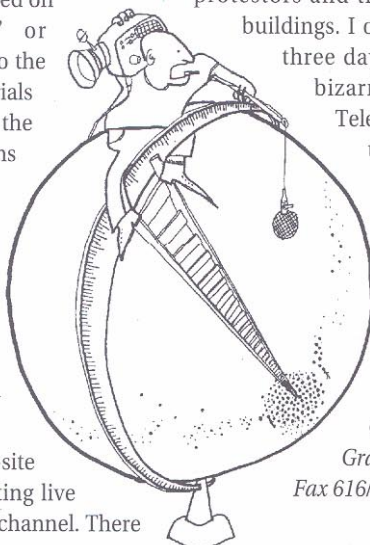
Courtesy South African Communications for Development

in his attempts to broadcast from Sarajevo. Annie Holmes of the Capricorn Video Unit in Zimbabwe talked of cameras replacing machetes in the hands of the Zulu and African National Congress factions. Closer to home, Paul Garrin provided a gripping "show and tell" of activist camcorder work with and for New York's homeless population. Horea Murgu from Romania pleaded with "media rich" countries to establish "relief" efforts for video equipment distribution similar to those for food and supplies. Marilyn Hyndman from Northern Ireland's Northern Visions production team showed some riveting video of the effects on children of the centuries old Protestant and Catholic battles.

Dozens of other presentors shared similar stories and tapes of critical developments in their countries and how tactical TV was smack dab in the middle of most of it. The conference had an amazing sense of urgency about it. These folks had way too much reality video of military men smashing heads and dogs chewing on protestors and the skeletal remains of burned and blown-out buildings. I only saw two "humorous" tapes out of 30 in the three days. (I've never had the quantity and quality of bizarre dreams as I had each night in Amsterdam.)

Television and especially camcorders were revered as tools to many of these folks. Tools with no less importance or relevancy than shovels, hammers or uzi submachine guns. Sometimes the rapid fire of rainbow slush splattering into eyes can have as much effect as an uzi. If the pen is mightier than the sword, the camcorder must be mightier than the oppressor.

Dirk Koning is Executive Director of the Community Media Center, 50 Library Plaza NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49503. Telephone 616/459-4788. Fax 616/459-3970. CIS E-mail 70762,541.



Courtesy Zebra News



# Figure & Ground

## *Information Technology and the Economic Marginalization of Women*

By Elin Whitney-Smith

All technologies have had ill effects. Even information technologies. Take the Press, for example. Everyone likes the press. It spread learning, literacy, science, the birth of capitalism, wealth, the birth of learning, the Enlightenment, the Renaissance.

Women, however, have never recovered the equality lost in the Renaissance.

Male/female, mind/body, exterior/interior, public/private, left brain/right brain, mathematical/verbal, business/home, science/art – all comfortable clichés of necessary opposites. Opposites that are applied to gender as if they were biological, as if they were intrinsic.

But consider pre-press Europe.

Before the press and the spread of literacy, domestic and income-producing tasks were like figure and ground of an illustration, each depending on the other. The family was a productive, as well as reproductive, unit. There was no business/home distinction.

Among the lower classes, a craftsman's wife was the second in command, so that if he died the unit could continue. In the guilds, widows took over the voting rights of their husbands. The vote belonged to the unit; the husband was the agent for the whole. Women belonged to guilds, ran and worked at every kind of enterprise.

A journeyman became a master by marrying a woman from his guild without whom he could not run his business. Apprentices and journeymen did domestic tasks as well as producing goods for sale. Men and women participated in the care and training of children as a normal part of the supervision of the household. The household was the focus and the foundation of the economy. Master and mistress, journeymen, apprentices, serving wenches and children lived, worked, ate, and slept in common concern for the welfare of the whole. There was no public/private distinction. There was little adult/child distinction.

In an unstable world this made great sense. If times were hard they all ate more bread. If times were good they all ate more meat and drank better wine. And at all times they worked.

Among the upper classes, women of the manor supervised the production of livestock, dairy products, spinning, weaving, sewing, and the marketing and storage of all surplus goods. Enterprising women increased their income by expanding the workrooms under their supervision and selling the finished goods in town.

Among the elite, information and education were

available to women whose families could pay for tutors. Spain and Italy continues the Muslim tradition of women mathematicians, astronomers, philosophers, doctors and poets in their universities. Germany had women professors and scholars. In France there was an entire class of Jewish women doctors, many trained at a large private medical school conducted by Sarah of St. Giles.

The press brought literacy and bookkeeping methods to the common people and changed the face of society. It emphasized some aspects of life at the expense of others, the way adding more ink to the work "figure" makes the work "ground" less visible.

Once people could keep track of the amount of material they needed and the amount of product they sold, it became apparent that some tasks were more lucrative than others. Maintaining a journeyman to swill the pigs or mind the baby didn't pay. Counting made it possible to plan and contracts made the future more secure. The flexibility of the common table and the common household became less necessary.

Tasks related to production of goods for sale emerged from the background of household activities. Domestic tasks became less visible as attention and resources went into production of goods for sale. The notion of labor became associated with tasks done for money. Business moved from the common room to a room of its own, to a floor of its own, to a separate building. With each move women became more and more identified with the background, the back quarters, the home – the beginning of distinctions such as business/home, public/private, exterior/interior.

The social world was divided up in a new way. Before the press, it was divided horizontally, by class. Information and education belonged to the elite. After the press, the world was divided vertically, by gender. More men of all classes had access to information. If they could use it to their advantage they could be socially and economically mobile. Women had little access to information and education, and their economic and social mobility depended on marriage.

The press emphasized and enlarged the slight differences that had existed, so both men and women were caught in deviation-amplifying (positive) feedback loops; over time in their life experiences spiraled away in opposite directions.

*Excerpted with permission from Whole Earth Review, Winter 1991; subscriptions to WER are \$20 a year (four issues) from PO Box 38, Sausalito, CA 94966, telephone 415/332-1716.*

## 1st Amendment Calendars Available

The year may be half over, but The Freedom Forum's First Amendment Calendar quotes are good any time, any year, and they're free. The calendars pay tribute to the First Amendment with a quote a day representing a wide range of views from diverse people, past and present.

The Freedom Forum is a non-partisan, international organization dedicated to free press, free speech and free spirit for all people established through the Gannett Foundations.

To receive a copy, contact the Freedom Forum at 1101 Wilson Blvd., Arlington, VA 22209 or call 703/528-0800.

## Critical Question!

"Although we have recognized that cable operators engage in speech protected by the First Amendment, we have not decided whether the activities of cable operators are more akin to that of newspapers or wireless broadcasters."

Chief Justice William Rehnquist in the U.S. Supreme Court decision to deny five cable operator's request to delay the June 2 effective date of the Cable Act of 1992's must-carry provisions.



*'The video put meaning in the paper process'*

## Citizens Use Access to Help Organize Development Battle

By Mitch Tlustos

When large scale development threatened to invade their quiet valley, the residents of the Laurelwood neighborhood were forced to either organize politically or watch their valued way of life change forever. Their determination and hard work, using public access television as a tool, is a story of community empowerment.

It takes more than a little imagination to picture a major, urban-style residential subdivision in the middle of Laurelwood, a rural community of 350 people located in Washington County, Oregon, 25 miles west of Portland. The small, unincorporated area of 171 acres is nestled in a mountain valley, forming a narrow wetlands basin.

The residents, mostly low to middle income families, and many of them farmers, share the rolling hills, forest, streams and croplands with a wide variety of wildlife including elk, deer, beaver, raccoons, pheasants, red-tail hawks, and rainbow trout. For over a century this has been a farming community. A single two-lane road connects it to the outside world. Laurelwood has no shops, no restaurants, no gas stations, no mass transit.

Nevertheless, in the fall of 1991, the Washington County Department of Land Use and Transportation granted preliminary approval of a "rural planned development" for a 54 lot single family subdivision in the heart of Laurelwood. Despite existing farm and forest zoning requirements of five acre minimum parcels, the majority of new homes would be built on one acre lots. Unless a formal appeal was filed, the subdivision, to be called "Laurelwood Estates," would proceed as approved.

According to Laurelwood resident Karen Murray, "We were very upset to discover that a huge section of our area was planned for development and we held local meetings to try to oppose it. I never knew I was going to become involved in the government process. I don't think any of us did. A group of individuals was appointed and called the Laurelwood Preservation Coalition or LPC. I



*Nels Nelson, a member of the Laurelwood Neighborhood Coalition, found that video was a powerful organizing tool in his group's fight against development in their rural Oregon community.*

just happened to go to the first meeting and got elected president."

The LPC quickly got down to business, including fund raising, publishing a newsletter, conducting research and hiring a prominent Oregon land use attorney. Committees were set up to collect information on adverse impacts of the development on public services, agriculture and wildlife, and sewage and run-off. From the time of their announced appeal in December, 1991, the 50 active members of the LPC spent nearly ten months collecting research while awaiting their public hearing.

Working through the facilities of Tualatin Valley Community Access, another member of the team, Kerry Benedict, began using video to assist the organizing effort. "I met weekly with the LPC board and our planning of a video helped focus the information for the public hearing," he said. "We used testimonials to present our arguments against the development. But more importantly, we were able to show the land, its farm and forest uses, and the wildlife to be found there. The video put meaning in the paper process."

On September 10, 1992, the Laurelwood Preservation Coalition presented its appeal of the subdivision approval to the Washington County hearings officer. One hundred of their supporters filled the auditorium. Through the 17 minute video and accompanying testimony, they demonstrated the development's impact on the area in terms of

water supply and drainage problems, substandard roads and increased traffic, overcrowded schools, and inadequate police and fire protection. Their most powerful argument was the introduction of a Federal Emergency Management map, unknown to the county, showing a large portion of the development to lie within the 100 year flood plain. The video included film footage shot in the 1950s of swift flood waters covering the site of the planned subdivision.

The appeal was successful. Approval for the development was rescinded. According to Karen Murray,

the video was important to the LPC's success. "It was put together so well, with a lot of facts, and the taping was done on such a beautiful day that it made you feel like you were right there, walking down the valley. Even area people who came to the hearing were taken aback. It brought them closer to what we were doing and made them realize, wait a minute, this is happening in our backyard. For the people on the fence, not sure which way to go, it brought them over. You could hear a pin drop when the video was played."

Residents of Laurelwood, despite no development this time around, will never be the same. They have discovered their ability to influence public decision making by working together as active problem solvers. "A lot of us got acquainted who never would have otherwise," says Nels Nelson, life-long Laurelwood resident and LPC secretary, "and we found we had talents we didn't even know about. It really drew us together as a community. None of us wants to spend our time fighting developers, but we won't stand by and allow them or anyone else to steamroll us out here. They thought we would just roll over and let it happen but they found out we care about what happens to our community."

*Mitch Tlustos is Community Programming Coordinator at Tualatin Valley Community Access. Contact him at: TVCA, 1815 NW 169th Place, Suite 6020, Beaverton, OR 97006. Telephone 503/629-8534.*



## Town Meeting Television Moves into the Information Age

by Lauren-Glenn Davitian

**N**ews of the death of the Vermont Town Meeting is premature. Channel 17, Town Meeting Television is moving this venerated Vermont tradition into the Information Age. What began as a volunteer effort covering progressive government and city council meetings in Burlington, Vermont for a few hours each week on the public access channel is now an automated 24 hour a day channel covering selectboards, school boards, planning commissions and public events of seven communities in Vermont's largest county.

Channel 17 is funded by a percentage of the gross revenue of Adelphia Cable's Chittenden County system (1.4% for operating and .4% for capital, equal to the public access channel's funding). Policy is established by a seven member board of elected and appointed municipal representatives, including town managers, city council members, village trustee chair, a mayor and activist citizens. The Chittenden County Government Access Channel Trustees hired CCTV to start-up and operate the channel beginning in September 1990.

In addition to the municipal meetings which air each night at 7 p.m., Channel 17 provides gavel-to-gavel coverage of local press conferences and produces a nightly live call-in show featuring elected officials, department heads, state luminaries and citizens discussing public policy issues.

We produce about 120 hours of new programming each month for an annual operating budget of about \$110,000. We have an annual capital budget of \$30,000 with which we recently upgraded from a VHS to S-VHS production and playback facility. Channel 17 employs two full-time workers (Channel Director and Program Manager), two part-time workers (to title and edit field and studio tapes) and six field producers to record the municipal meetings. Volunteer community producers provide 20 - 25% of our programming each month and are responsible for producing the nightly live call-in show and as well as public events of interest to them.

The best gauge of Channel 17's success is election time. During 1992, Town Meeting Television covered the local appearances and press conferences of all national presidential candidates (including Libertarian candidate Andre Marrou and Natural Law party candidate John Haglin), produced and aired debates for all statewide candidates (including third and fourth party candidates), featured the statewide conventions of Vermont's three major parties, live debates with every legislative candidate of concern to the citizens in our seven member communities as well as extensive coverage of the Burlington police state bond vote.

Once the returns were in on November 3, Channel

*In many ways, our coverage of these distinctly local races were even more important because they are chronically under-reported by the big-time print and television outlets.*

17 launched the only county-wide live election results program with local radio news and print reporters as anchors, up-to-the-minute results from the clerks and poll workers at 28 sites, tape delayed reports from field crews at each of the major political parties and a live feed (courtesy of the local NBC affiliate). In addition to live reporting on the air, Channel 17 provided election numbers to the Associated Press and the statewide radio service which in turn reported them to news outlets throughout Vermont.

The March 1993 Town Meeting Elections followed quickly on the heels of our November Election Extravaganza. In many ways, our coverage of these distinctly local races (mayors, city council, selectboard and school board seats and ballot items) were even more important because they are chronically under-reported by the big-time print and television outlets.

Again, once the polls were closed we reported live election results on Town Meeting Night. The program aired at all of the celebratory events and, according to the many calls we received during and following the program, by hundreds of viewers throughout Chittenden County.

The true testimonial to the importance of our coverage came from the newly elected mayor of Burlington who arrived at Channel 17 Election Central as soon as the results indicated his major surprise upset. His first (stunned) comments were heard by Channel 17 viewers - including remarks about the importance of our election results show. The re-elected mayor of Winooski claims that his large margin of victory was due to his consistent exposure during regular city council meetings as well as his monthly live call-in program.

Channel 17 ratings are not reported in the Nielson's but word of mouth and growing requests for re-runs, tape copies and bookings for important meetings indicates that we are regarded increasingly as an essential service for interested citizens.

*Lauren-Glenn Davitian is Channel Director of Channel 17, Town Meeting Television. Contact her at 294 North Winooski Avenue, Burlington, Vermont 05401-3680. Phone: 802/862-3966. Fax 802/862-1645.*

## Cable Television in the Info Age

Looking for the industry's take on cable in the 21st century? A new 48-page booklet produced by the National Cable Television Association Research & Policy Analysis Department offers readers a glimpse into the cable industry's plans and promises for the future.

Among the sections in **Twenty First Century Television: Cable Television Delivers the Information Age** are an Overview of Cable System Architecture and Cable's Growth; Cable Systems of the Future and Today (including fiber optics, digital compression, addressability and interactivity, HDTV, and regional hubs); Current Applications of State-of-the-Art Cable Television Technology (including video services, non-traditional services and new services); and Multimedia and Other Joint Ventures with the Computer Industry.

A number of appendices are also included in the booklet that should be of interest to media activists.

To receive a copy, contact the NCTA Research & Policy Analysis Department at 1724 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20036 or call 202-775-3680.



*'Television delivers people. You are the product of TV.'*

## Whittling Away at the Public Sphere

By Dee Dee Halleck

Next year 8 million high school students will watch Mountain Dew and Snickers ads in their classrooms each day. The ads are packaged with some "lite" news and upbeat features such as teen fashions and skateboard competitions to make them more palatable for the kids. For the educators there's a "tough teacher contest," and on the closing segment last May, there was a fast-paced MTV-type montage segment laced with bite-sized quotes from such PC-proof white male Western classics as Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, and Cicero. The programming, however, is clearly secondary to the real agenda of the Whittle Corporation's Channel One: to make a profit by selling rooms full of sedated youngsters to advertising agencies. As Richard Serra and Carlota Schoolman said many years ago in an early video art piece: "Television delivers people. You are the product of TV."

**Marketing School Children.** The Whittle Corporation has discovered a large and easily harvested product: the school children of the United States. Not only does Whittle want to sell the kids to Pop Tarts' and Pepsi's ad agencies, they want to set up their own chain of corporate private schools, through which they hope to sell the kids back to their parents: These schools will be partially subsidized by vouchers from state and federal education funds.

Some of the objections to the Whittle initiative are naïve and misguided. There is nothing wrong with television per se in schools. There is nothing wrong with children watching international and national news in classrooms. There is nothing wrong with satellite-delivered media. And there are hard realities which make Channel One attractive to many schools. A beleaguered teacher from a small rural African American community in North Carolina told a colleague of mine not to knock Whittle. Her school had zero budget for equipment and supplies and was still using textbooks from 1955, but by agreeing to show the kids Channel One, the school received a brand new TV set and a satellite dish that enable them to tape other programs for classroom use. While one can empathize with teachers combatting the paucity of education funds in most states, one should be careful about endorsing an enterprise which at this point has a rather large foot in the door of our public school system, however badly in need of repair that system may be.

**Message Art.** Channel One recently did a feature series (one a day for four days) on "the fascinating world of the visual arts," as their cheery correspondent described it from her perch on a

*While one can empathize with teachers combatting the paucity of education funds in most states, one should be careful about endorsing an enterprise which at this point has a rather large foot in the door of our public school system, however badly in need of repair that system may be.*

stool in William Wegman's studio. After watching Wegman glue leaves to the latest reincarnation of Man Ray as a Weimaraner, she oohed and aahed at the "collaborative" way in which Wegman worked – i.e., with one assistant to hold the dog and another to tilt the quartz light. The segment closed with an art history montage of famous dogs in art. The next day's segment was about Nina Levy, a Chicago sculptor who designs the little plastic animals they give away in cereal boxes. Her segment closed with an ad for Pop Tarts that was set in a gallery in which some Lichtenstein-like paintings join in the chorus for the heavily sugared pastries. The third segment of "Now That's Art!" was on Chuck Close and ended with a historical segment on Seurat and pointillism and a Sprint commercial showing how the "points of light" in their network helped to end Soviet Communism. The last segment was on Rea Tajiri and video art. Rea declares that she is making video with a message, and clips of her moving documentary on the World War II internment camps are shown. The message that ended this clip was a closeup of a Van Gogh while a lugubrious voice intoned that this painting sold for more than \$82 million. Then came an ad for Three Musketeers candy bars. So much for message art.

Although the "Now That's Art!" series was equally balanced between women and men and carefully inclusive of a person of color, the question of sponsorship remains. One might also question the representation of art as celebrity gossip. There is no question, however, that Channel One is a dangerous presence in the lives of our children. The whole notion of passive "education" is itself a real contradiction in terms. Education is active if it is education. The only thing that is active on this channel is the corporate message. But television in schools does not have to be passive indoctrination to corporate hegemony. Looking beyond Channel One's oppressive corporate shadow on the horizon,

### Quick Quips

**"Movies and radio need no longer to pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce."**

Max Horkheimer and  
Theodor W. Adorno, 1947

**"Enormous improvements in communication have made understanding more difficult."**

Harold Innis,  
Canadian economist

**"If you believe in the great spirit, the web will catch your good ideas – and the bad ones will go through the hole."**

Lakota Sioux explaining  
a dream catcher.

**"I rarely think in words at all."**

Albert Einstein

**"The idea of a democracy in this country is based on an informed citizenry, an intelligent citizenry – and you can't be intelligent without being informed. That's what Deep Dish TV is all about."**

Studs Terkel



what are some examples of active and imaginative in-school television?

### Some Alternatives

● "Here, Thayer, and Everywhere" is a satellite network for progressive public schools that transmits from Winchester, New Hampshire, where a small high school in the middle of a working-class New England town has been having enormous success in motivating youth and teachers. Their monthly satellite program looks at innovative ways of dealing with classroom subjects and administrative problems and is lively, made by kids together with their teachers. It pulls together a loose network of more than 130 schools who are members of a group called the Coalition for Effective Schools. Their programs are funky, casual, and fun, and the teachers and students are very supportive and enthusiastic. (Elliot Washer, Thayer High School, 85 Parker St., Winchester, NH 03470.)

● Strategies for Media Literacy is a San Francisco-based national organization that helps teachers with curricula around media issues. Director Kathleen Tyner helps to organize workshops in schools that give teachers ideas for critical viewing in the classroom. They might include a segment from Channel One in their workshop, but would encourage students to note distortions and assumptions in their news reports and to look for hidden agendas in their seductive advertisements. Tyner publishes a helpful newsletter listing resources and conferences. (SML, Inc., 1095 Market St., Rm. 410, San Francisco, CA 94103.)

● The Educational Video Center has trained hundreds of teachers in creative media work. They have helped to staff many alternative high schools and junior highs with video teachers, and have set up workshops in many schools around the country. (Educational Video Center, 60 E. 13th St., 4th Fl., New York, NY 10003.)

● Paper Tiger Television, a collective that I work with, distributes more than 200 video tapes that critiques the media in a homemade, down-to-earth style. The subjects range from a critical look at TV Guide to a stinging indictment of the portrayal of teenagers themselves. These programs are good for classroom viewing and discussion. (Paper Tiger Television, 339 Lafayette St., New York, NY 10012.)

*Reprinted courtesy of Lies Of Our Times, September 1992.*

*Dee Dee Halleck teaches communications at the University of California at San Diego and is a founder of Paper Tiger Television and Deep Dish TV, a community-access satellite network. Dee Dee was the recipient of the Alliance for Community Media's George Stoney Award for Humanistic Communications in 1991. She may be reached at Box 50, Willow, NY 12495. Telephone 914/679-2756.*

## Point of View:

### Communication & Development

Communication is a key to democratic development. If Progressive movements and organisations are to influence the political development seriously, they need more powerful media.

Their TV-stations ought to have the possibility of transmitting through satellites and they should have access to thousands of radio stations to present their opinions.

Aid-agencies of the rich part of the world can offer the necessary knowledge and hardware. It should be just as natural to make communication projects as to dig wells and support poor farmers.

But many aid-agencies oppose the communication projects. They have plenty of arguments: communication-projects are technically too complicated and politically controversial. The authorities of the receiving countries are conscious of the fact that radio-and tv-stations are powerful weapons in the hands of opposition groups.

But these arguments are not good enough. One has to realize that the romantic dreams of the indigenous people's main communication via ritual dances and storytelling don't have roots in the real world. In that way the indigenous people remain without influence on their own future.

One can't have a person walking around in a corner of the Amazonas for a year, merely in order to call the rubberworkers for a meeting. Before all the participants have been called, cattle-kings or oil-companies have prepared themselves for the outcome of the meeting. The rubberworkers need their own radio in order to take active part in the drawing up of their own future.

Cattle-kings and oil-companies will, like any other authority, consider the radio a dangerous weapon in the hands of rubberworkers. This because the radio has a much more immediate effect than for instance a health-project. Within hours after the inauguration of a new radio- or TV-station, local even national power-structures can be challenged. In extreme situations an unknown person can get famous, enter the field of politics or criticize the government with a strong impact.

Mainly therefore communication projects are a touchy field for many aid agencies. They stick to digging wells, building schools and developing the agriculture.

They have to realize that it is necessary to take a more political stand-point if they want to live up to their aims of effectively supporting the most marginalized of the world.

— Steffen Knudsen & Lisa Klöcker

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## The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

## Article 10, European Convention on Human Rights, 1950

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interest of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.

## 'No Innovation Without Representation'

# Artifact/Ideas and Political Culture

By Langdon Winner

This is a Time of Great Excitement about the fruitful possibilities of new technology, but also a time of grave concern about what those possibilities mean for the future of our society. Horizons visible in microelectronics and photonics, biotechnology, composite materials, computing, and other fields hold out prospects of sweeping change in our way of life. How should we regard these prospects?

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Everyone understands that political ideas can be expressed in language. But ideas of this kind present themselves in material objects as well. In this form they might be called artifact/ideas. In their silence, artifact/ideas have a great deal to say. They tell us who we are, where we are situated in the social order, what is normal, what is possible, what is excluded. The technological world is filled with artifact/ideas of great consequence for modern political culture. Things often speak louder than words. Among the many ideas present in the structure of contemporary technological devices and systems are the following:

Power is centralized.

The few talk and the many listen.

There are barriers between social classes.

The world is hierarchically structured.

The good things are distributed unequally.

Women and men have different kinds of competence.

One's life is open to continual inspection.

As they are expressed in the shapes of material objects, ideas of this kind are covert. They seldom become topics for discussion in the political sphere as it is usually understood. One reason that artifact/ideas tend to be covert is that most people buy the functional account of the meaning of material things. We are inclined to say: "This is a car, which enables us to go from point A to point B." "This is a hoe, which helps us to dig in the fields."

Another reason why ideologies in things tend to be covert is that they have been implanted there by those who do not wish the ideas to be known or widely discussed. The apparent solidity of useful things sometimes provides a mask for persons and

groups who wish to exercise power while avoiding responsibility. Their alibi is usually something like: "This is the most effective way to do things" or "This is most efficient."

But whatever the source of specific beliefs and instrumental conditions, it is often true that ideas embodied in material things are painful or even dangerous to acknowledge. Artifact/ideas can involve astonishing contradictions. In particular, the mapping of the world encountered in the shape of things frequently contradicts the political ideology to which most people in Western societies claim to be committed.

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Please note the fast forward symbol. It's used occasionally where, because of space limitations, we've had to fast forward through a manuscript. We invite you to check out the publication it originally appeared in.

Many of the artifact/ideas prevalent in our time stand in flagrant contradiction to the ideology of modern democracy. That ideology holds that human beings flourish, achieving what is best in their potential, under conditions of freedom, equality, justice, and self-government. In that light, societies ought to create social conditions and political institutions that make it possible for each human being's potential to develop. Both victories and setbacks in this regard are clearly visible in the laws, constitutions, and political practices that prevail in each historical period.

From this vantage point, a technological society is unique only in the sense that it presents new and seemingly unlikely domains – domains of instrumentality – in which the ends of democratic freedom, equality and justice may somehow be recognized and realized. I take it to be the fundamental failure of modern civilization to have ignored again and again how such questions present themselves in the guise of "neutral" technologies. To a considerable extent, the ideas embodied in material things stand in opposition to the central ideas that we believe describe and guide our political culture.

There is an important way in which freedom, democracy, and justice depend in human communities upon the existence of suitable material environments – the creation and maintenance of arrangements in which the goal of becoming free, self-determining individuals is nurtured rather than

*...if we fail to confront the world-shaping powers that new technologies present; then human freedom and dignity could well become obsolete remnants of a bygone era.*



destroyed. As we look at the kinds of sociotechnical innovation being introduced today, it is often beside the point to ask whether or not they are optimally efficient; by someone's definition they are usually very efficient indeed. Instead, the crucial questions concern the kinds of cultural environments such technologies present to us. What one finds are far too many instances of developments of the following kind:

(1) communications technologies employed in attempts to control people's thoughts, desires and behaviors;

(2) computer technologies used to whittle away people's privacy and erode freedom;

(3) information technologies that eliminate what were formerly places of community life;

(4) energy systems that make people dependent upon, or even hostage to, sources of fuel over which they exercise no control;

(5) systems of manufacturing that seek control by eliminating as much human initiative and creativity as possible.

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In that light I would offer three guiding maxims as a way to focus discussions about the relationship between technological choices and the future of political culture. These maxims can be raised at times in which unquestioned assumptions about "productivity," "competitiveness," "the need to innovate," or "technology transfer" seem to provide the only language for talking about the choices at hand.

1. No innovation without representation. This suggests that all the groups and social interests likely to be affected by a particular kind of technological change ought to be represented at a very early stage in defining what that technology will be. Let us accept the idea that particular technologies are social creations that arise through a complex, multicentered process. But let us see to it that all the relevant parties are included, rather than kept in the dark about this process. If we find that we do not have the kinds of social institutions that make this possible, then let's change our institutions to create such opportunities.

2. No engineering without political deliberation. Proposed technological projects should be closely examined to reveal the covert political conditions and artifact/ideas their making would entail. This ought to become an interpretive skill of people in all modern societies. It is especially important for engineers and technical professionals whose wonderful creativity is often accompanied by appalling narrowmindedness. The education of engineers ought to prepare them to evaluate the kinds of political contexts, political ideas, political arguments, and political consequences involved in their work. Skill in the arts of democratic citizenship ought to become part of the "tool kit" that engineers master in their education.

3. No means without ends. Many of the varieties of

innovation pushed on the public these days amount to tools looking for uses, means looking for ends. Those who have dealt with the introduction of computers into the schools in recent years can give many colorful examples of this phenomenon. The current promotion of high-definition television and renewed efforts to push President Reagan's Star Wars project offer even more stark illustration. For HDTV and SDI bear little relationship to any significant human need. As we study the prospects offered by new technologies, it is always essential to ask: Why are we doing this? What are the ends we have chosen and how well do they fit the pattern of means available? In many cases of high-tech planning, suitable background music would be the theme from "Twilight Zone."

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UTOPIA's goal was to fashion a system that would be highly advanced technically, but designed in ways that would take into account the skills, needs, and perspectives of those who would eventually be using it. Rather than develop a system under management directives and then impose it on workers, the project included representation of the people concerned. UTOPIA became the focus of a rigorous program of research and development at a government-sponsored laboratory, The Center for Working Life in Stockholm. Here was a case in which the purely instrumental and economic thrust of technological innovation encountered a legitimate set of political ends and enlightened artifact/ideas. The result was democratization expressed in hardware, software, and human relationships.

The technological world of the twenty-first century beckons. Will it be better than the one we now inhabit, or worse? Will it realize the promise of human freedom, or curtail it? And whose interests will be decisive?

If ordinary citizens are to be empowered in shaping the world to come, we must become very skillful in areas where we are now profoundly ignorant: using ideas and abilities that enable us to define and realize human freedom and social justice within the realm of technology itself: within things like new machines for the workplace, computerized systems of information management, biotechnologies in agriculture and medicine, communications devices introduced into our homes. If we cannot develop these skills, or do not care to; if we fail to confront the world-shaping powers that new technologies present; then human freedom and dignity could well become obsolete remnants of a bygone era.

*Excerpted with permission from Whole Earth Review, Winter 1991; subscriptions to WER are \$20 a year (four issues) from PO Box 38, Sausalito, CA 94966, telephone 415/332-1716.*

*Langdon Winner is a political theorist who specializes in social and political issues. He is the author of Autonomous Technology and The Whale and the Reactor.*

## Democratic Communications in the Information Age

**While numerous books extoll the virtues of instant communication and its potential for developing the information society, few touch on the very essence of communications systems: Who owns them? Who controls them? And for what purposes.**

***Democratic Communications in the Information Age*, edited by Janet Wasko and Vincent Mosco, is such a book, "critically assessing the potential for information and communication resources to challenge and transform the dominant political economy."**

**"Contributors examine the meaning of democratic communications and its role in society; the positive and negative effects of new information technologies on communications and the use of communications resources by progressive social movements and whether they can rely on the mainstream media to convey their message."**

**Included is a piece by Douglas Kellner on "Public Access Television and the Struggle for Democracy." Cost of the book is \$21, which includes postage and handling in the US and Canada. For more information, contact Ablex Publishing, 355 Chesnut St., Norwood, NJ 07648-2090.**



# Geographical Inequalities:

## *The Spatial Bias of the New Communication Technologies*

By Andrew Gillespie and Kevin Robins

### A National Telecommunications Infrastructure

Calling the debate over the nation's telecommunications policy until now largely a "struggle among entrenched commercial interests over who will control and dominate markets such as information services, manufacturing, and long distance service," the Electronic Frontier Foundation is proposing a national telecommunications infrastructure.

"It is time to refocus the debate by seeking near-term technological, economic, legislative, and regulatory solutions that will encourage the rapid development of a diverse information services market and help realize the democratic potential of new information media," the EFF says in its proposal, *The Open Platform*.

The EFF is a public interest organization founded in 1990 and dedicated to the free and open flow of information and communication.

Copies of *The Open Platform* are available free. Contact the Electronic Frontier Foundation at 666 Pennsylvania Ave. SE, Suite 303, Washington, DC 20003. Telephone 202/544-9237. Fax 202/547-5481. Internet: [eff@eff.org](mailto:eff@eff.org). The document is available on the Internet in the FTP archive, at [ftp.eff.org](ftp://ftp.eff.org).

Contrary to popular predictions of their decentralizing impact, digital communications contribute to new and more complex forms of corporate integration, reinforcing center-periphery problems on a global scale.

The new technologies of communication are inherently spatial. By this, we mean not only that they change the relational distances between places and, in so doing, help construct new economic and social geographies and new forms of spatial division and integration. We mean further that geography is a constitutive element of communications networks, which are spatial systems in their own right. New communication technologies do not just impact upon places; places and the social processes and social relationships they embody also affect how such technological systems are designed, implemented, and used.

Advanced communication networks are being developed and introduced within an existing economic and social context that displays stark geographical inequalities: between, for example, rich and poor nations, central and peripheral regions, cities and rural areas. We contend that the "distance-shrinking" characteristics of the new communication technologies, far from overcoming and rendering insignificant the geographical expressions of centralized economic and political power, in fact constitute new and enhanced forms of inequality and uneven development.

The view that advances in the technologies of communication will finally and irrevocably overcome the "tyranny of geography" and reduce spatial inequalities needs to be seen as part of a broader historical interpretation of the impact of technology on society. In this familiar rhetoric, technological progress is unproblematically equated with economic growth and human improvement; it is an unquestioned article of faith that "progress [is] the handmaiden of democracy". What James Carey describes as a "Whig interpretation of communications history" is "the story of the expansion of the powers of human knowledge, the steady democratization of culture, the enlargement of freedom, and the erosion of monopolies of knowledge through more democratic sharing".

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From this perspective, then, technological progress will facilitate the transcendence not only of inequalities between regions but of those between urban and rural areas. The constraints of space and time and the particularities of place diminish and disappear in this vision of a harmonious and egalitarian post-industrial society in which will be found "all information in all places at all times": a

utopia in the literal sense of "no place." Such views are at once influential, wishful, misleading, and irresponsible, because they conceptualize technology and technological change outside of any social, economic, political, or cultural context. They are technologically determinist because, on the basis of what changes new technologies might possibly effect, they extrapolate about what will necessarily and inevitably occur.

Although we reject the premise that communications technologies will be only progressive and liberating in their social implications, at the same time we recognize the enormous importance of technological advances to the nature and organization – including the spatial organization – of society. Technology has an inherent "bias," for it can never be neutral or independent of society's broader social and political biases. At the same time, however, its potency makes it invariably the site and stake of struggle, the outcome of which is never preordained.

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We need first to establish the limits to the conventional thinking that equates advances in telecommunication with earlier models concerning the impact of transportation improvements. We must be wary of treating telecommunications too readily as the communications infrastructure for the information age, because of the crucial distinction we need to make between public and private networks. Most networks are private in that they are proprietary systems available only to an authorized group of end-users. The new "electronic highways" of the information society are not, therefore, public thoroughfares but are more akin to a myriad of private roads.

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McLuhan's assumption that electronic communication technologies contain an inherently decentralizing bias and that the friction of distance and the inequalities between centers and peripheries, which depend on such friction, will soon be abolished. We beg to differ with the premise that, in real rather than wishfully imagined social, economic, and political contexts, advanced communications technologies have, because of their space-binding characteristics, an inherent centralizing bias.

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Are we, as the post-industrial futurologists would have us believe, heading toward a new era of electronic decentralization and rural utopia?

*Excerpted with permission from the Journal of Communication 39(3), Summer 1989.*

Andrew Gillespie and Kevin Robins are Professors in the Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, U.K.



## **Making Your Access Center a Voter Registration Site**

By Joyce Miller

**D**uring the month of September, and in preparation for the Presidential election, Cincinnati Community Video created an eight-hour live program called "Voter Registration." The purpose of the program was simple: to raise awareness about the importance of registering to vote.

The program's kick-off featured the Mayor of Cincinnati reading a proclamation declaring the day "Voter Registration Day" in Cincinnati.

Each hour a new guest appeared – a politician, media representative or community leader – to discuss a different topic, and to promote the importance of registering to vote and going to the polls on election day. The predominant issue raised with each of the guests, whether Sheriff, Democratic Party chair, or City Council member, was the importance of becoming involved in the political process at least by registering.

Viewers who called in questions, or participated in the live studio audience, were encouraged to come into our access studio to register. Our facility is on a number of main bus lines and is physically accessible to all citizens. Bus routes were given along with directions to the site.

Throughout the course of the program information was provided on a variety of topics such as public voter registration sites, statistics on voter turnouts for municipal, primary, and presidential elections, and much more. Tape roll-ins on voter apathy provided "on the street" insights regarding voter attitudes towards politics in general. A six-minute video asking "What does the President do?" offered a glimpse of public perceptions of the nation's highest office.

Vignettes were aired examining everything from how to cast a ballot to examining candidate's debates. A voter registration quiz was given, prompting viewer response. Questions about what citizens should do if they had moved, hadn't voted in many years, or were new voters, were addressed. Public service announcements encouraging voter

registration were run during program breaks.

The eight hour marathon voter show was the brainchild of CCV Education Coordinator Jo Throckmorton. Jo had read about the League of Women Voters going into schools to register eighteen-year-olds and felt public access could easily expand on the concept. He organized volunteer teams for each hour of production. Including tape roll-in segments as well as crew assistance on the day of the production, about 25 volunteers and access staff were utilized. Jo created two distinct triple-camera sets in the access studio for easy transition between guests.

When CCV examined the issue of voter registration, we found a high degree of public misconception about the simple process of registering to vote. First, anyone certified by our local Board of Elections can register any qualified citizen at any location until 30 days before an election. The Board has a list of certified deputy agents.

In Cincinnati, becoming "deputized" to register voters is easily done through our local Board of Elections. Usually citizen groups organized behind a particular issue will have a number of voter deputies in their group. Access staff members can become certified agents. For our production, however, we used representatives from the League of Women Voters, who also appeared on the program.

Though the topic of voter registration is considered "ho hum" by most of the media, we did get coverage because of the sheer length of the program. More importantly, however, we did register citizens to vote.

Registering voters is one more role an access center can play in encouraging citizen participation in the democratic process. Our effort was ambitious. I would recommend a three- or four-hour program done on a Saturday or in the evening hours which was when we received our biggest response.

*Joyce Miller is Executive Director of Cincinnati Community Video, 3130 Wasson Road, Cincinnati, OH 45209. Telephone 513/871-2730.*

## **The Updated Yellow Pages**

**Another indispensable tool for community activists is the Alliance's Updated Yellow Pages. The directory includes cable consultants and attorneys, video production equipment vendors and a plethora of information that includes Alliance organizational members, Alliance Public Policy Platform, 1984 and 1992 Cable Acts, Federal Communications Commission, independent media producers and distributors, related organizations, recommended reading, and more.**

**Cost of the Yellow Pages is \$15 for Alliance members, \$20 for non-members. It's available from the Alliance at 666 11th St. NW, Suite 806, Washington, DC 20001-4542. Telephone 202/393-2650.**

## **Union for Democratic Communications**

**Another "sister in arms" in the media and democracy arena is the Union for Democratic Communications. This membership group hosts regional meetings, publishes the *Democratic Communique* four times a year in three languages (Spanish, French and English) and has an excellent membership directory. They are planning their annual conference in Cuba in early December. They service many academicians and publish papers on media democracy. Membership is \$30 annually and can be secured through: UDC, Dept. of Communication, 585 Manoogian Hall, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202.**



## Access, Advocacy and Democracy. . .

continued from page 1

does not know.

An unfortunate failure of intellect? Absolutely not. Why should they know. They haven't asked us. Nor does it appear that they will. This temporary knowledge deficit provides us – the parties in this puzzle with those increasingly tenuous rights of expression and association – with a window of opportunity to define what we believe to be necessary in future scenarios.

What do we know about our advocacy needs in the future's democratic society? We certainly must acknowledge that, even though it has been on less than stable policy and financial footings and has far to go to reach its potential, cable access has worked reasonably well as a democratic forum and as a platform for advocacy. There are thousands of stories that speak to the effectiveness of the medium.

Advocacy requires that we both inform and persuade. We are not likely to persuade one to embrace our position if we have not produced sufficient information about the issues involved. The process of informing is a significant one, for in many cases, particularly in the public interest arena, we find that if we had the resources to effectively inform, the task of persuading would become rudimentary.

It seems, then, that we will need:

- sufficient training, finances and time to participate in this First Amendment enterprise

- access to adequate resources [electronic libraries, for example] to compile/analyze information

- access to adequate facilities and equipment to put our information and our position in a communicable format for the appropriate media [presently video for television, but perhaps laser disc for multimedia formats of the future]

- access to facilities and equipment to physically communicate our information and position via the appropriate media [i.e., that omnipotent information highway]

- access to facilities and equipment to receive this and similar communications.

If we analyze these needs in the context of video dial tone as proposed by the FCC, none of them are met. In fact, none of them are even considered. The FCC made some noise about the sheer number of available channels resulting in access to the system for all. *Time* magazine [April 12, 1993] states that "...The same switches used to send a TV show to

your home can also be used to send a video from your home to any other...The same system will allow anybody with a camcorder to distribute videos to the world..."

Oh, really? What a beautiful scenario *Time* depicts here. Why didn't *Time* explain this valuable democratic potential to its parent company, Time Warner Enterprises [who filed a sweeping lawsuit claiming, *inter alia*, that all access provisions of the 1984 and 1992 cable acts are unconstitutional]. Or why didn't *Time* explain this to us – the readers? How will this new ubiquitous, easy use-easy access system work? How are we going to be able to create our messages? How will the needed facilities/equipment to do it – whatever they are – be supported? Will the costs for noncommercial speech in video dial tone be free? Who will decide? Who? What? How???

Well, we have developed a fairly clear statement of our needs as media users in a democracy. There is, however, great difficulty in defining just what should, can or will exist in terms of future highways and hardware. Since time periods in electronic history are growing increasingly shorter, it is perhaps impossible to attempt such a definition. What we must define, however, is the process through which we can (1) ensure that appropriate forums for access to media are ever present and (2) define the future taxonomies of information and their relative levels of access.

Clearly, our ability to participate in these powerful processes has not and will not come to us by gift or by fiat. It must be procured with power. "What power have we", you say? Well, the first (and most obvious) source of power is in our numbers. Community media becomes powerful when we amass broad based, public support. We must provide increased information such that individuals and service organizations become self actualized through recognition of the power of access resulting in their collective demand for inclusion.

Secondly, an equal or perhaps a more direct road to power will come from taking deliberate steps to make access visible and indispensable to decision makers. During the mid-'80s, we were able to define the franchising process in such a way as to enable the creation of and some support for access. The FCC has regulated that process away. We must move quickly to restore such a process for definition, local control and support.

One person, one vote. Our policymakers must be made to pay the penalty for operating under any model that does not contemplate that every person is an

indispensable chip in the circuit. There must exist the opportunity for every person to participate in the decision making process leading to the design and deployment of future telecommunications systems.

Our need to ensure that effective forums for two-way access to electronic media is a glaring one. However, the second part of the process of participation that involves development of information taxonomies is also vital. Should we all have access to **all** information? What happens to the competing rights of privacy? Should I, a member of the voting public, have electronic access to the medical records of candidates? Must all prospective investors have free access to obscure stock market information for which some are willing to pay "premium" rates? At some point, market forces will inevitably enter into the equation. We must be a partner in designing that point of entry.

We all must think, live and work in a swivel ergonomic chair. In one workspace are our technical tools – keyboards, video cameras, disk drives, databases, modems, microprocessors, faxcards, monitors, satellites and their up and down links, and all of the techno-tools that the next century will bring. However, good people, we can not allow to be forgotten the higher workspace. We must spin around in that swivel chair and address the principles and values that will aid us in developing a worthy, final product. We must remain ever mindful of the power and the abilities of everyday people and the results of their participation or exclusion.

When those technical tools spew data that indicate that decisions about the emerging telecommunications system meet and exceed cost sensitivity, optimal market based analysis standards, **swivel around**. So did the arguments for human enslavement. Information and information access are too important and valuable a currency in our democracy's future to be left to market forces. We will all pay for it sooner or later. Let's choose, systematically, to invest in it up front.

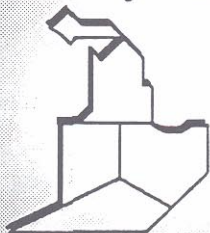
I continue to believe that the people's access to and use of electronic media can make a positive difference in the quality of human life. I know now that our ability to do that will require heightened effort and strategy. I also know that this democratic enterprise and its ultimate effect are both too valuable not to achieve. Our ability to speak what we have to say, and to persuade others to join with us to effect social progress speak directly to our continued existence as a society and as a people.

*T. Andrew Lewis is Executive Director of the Alliance for Community Media.*



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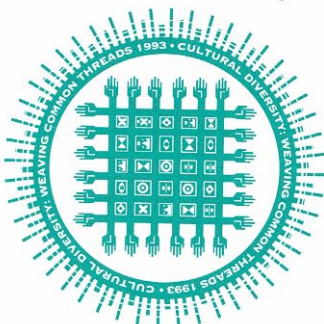


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